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FEED RESERVES SAFEGUARD THE BREEDING HERD

Bureau of Animal Industry, Agricultural Research Administration
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

The livestock producer suffers or is blessed according to weather variations. Only a few of his losses are the direct result of bad weather. The greater damage is an indirect result through failure to set aside adequate feed reserves to meet the needs arising out of weather extremes. The successful stockman manages his feed supply with an eye to what may be the worst to happen weather wise.

Trouble may appear in many forms. It may be summer droughts with short pasture and hay crops; heavy fall rains that deplete grass minerals; long winters with deep snow; or late springs causing use of all available forage, some of which is likely to be of poor quality. Even normal winter range and low quality hay are usually poor in protein and phosphorous and need the supplement of a little oil seed cake.

Thus, losses are not limited by season or by locality. Trouble can come anytime, anywhere. But in most regions of the country, stockmen consider a certain year as being good or bad according to the amount of feed required for wintering. The good years bring optimism and possibly some expansion in cattle numbers, while the bad years may bring a serious depletion of breeding herds. Such forced reductions can seriously cripple an otherwise sound breeding program.

BALANCED YEAR-ROUND SUPPLIES

Maintaining a sound inventory of breeding stock requires the storage of adequate feed reserves for the lean years, and maximum use of pasture or range forage. The problem differs for each individual ranch or farm operation. Basically, however, it is important on all types of properties to insure a proper balance between summer and winter feed supply. Management practices should permit maximum use of range or pasture grasses and, at the same time, permit the storing of feed reserves. In this respect, reserve acreages of range forage are just as important as hay and silage reserves.

In some areas research and experience have shown that it is a sound management practice to winter cattle at, or slightly above, maintenance so that they are turned out on spring pasture in thrifty condition. Growing beef cattle have a tendency to produce about the same yearly gain regardless of how they are wintered. Cattle that make a high winter gain with the use of concentrates or other feeds make correspondingly lower summer gains. Whereas cattle roughed through the winter on a ration slightly above maintenance make high summer gains and about the same total gain for the year as the well-wintered cattle.

USE OF HAY AND SILAGE

Surplus grass stored either as hay or silage fits in well with pasture and range management programs. Grass silage is a "natural" in many localities where it is difficult to cure good hay on account of rain. Therefore, some stockmen have changed the old adage to read "Make hay while the sun shines... and make grass silage when it rains." In many areas mixed types of grasses can be ensiled with equally as good results as such crops as corn, alfalfa, Johnson grass, or sudan grass. Because silage keeps well for as long as five to six years it represents one of the best forms of feed insurance.

Where various hays are the chief source of stored forages it is important to cut hay early. The protein content of hay is affected quite materially by the time of cutting. Late-cut hay contains only 50 to 70 per cent as much total protein as early-cut hay. The poorer the quality of hay, the greater the need to add a supplement to the ration. Poor hay merely handicaps the animal to which it is fed and decreases the efficiency and economy of production.

A CHECK LIST OF POINTS TO REMEMBER

The following is a check list of points worth emphasizing so that beef production may be more efficient, stable, and profitable:

- ✓ Insure an adequate pasture, range, and roughage program to supply necessary feed according to prevailing climatic conditions so that summer and winter feed supply will be balanced to maintain the base cow herd in all seasons.
- ✓ Use home grown feeds and concentrates in preference to purchased feeds as far as possible.
- ✓ Where home grown feeds are of such low quality that cattle cannot be maintained on them alone, purchase protein supplements for greater returns. In this same connection, insure adequate and correct mineral supplementation.
- ✓ Maintain a reserve supply of both grass and roughage. Do not overstock range or pasture land. Reserve acreages of range or pasture are just as important as hay or silage reserves.
- ✓ Consider the use of grass or legume silage as a source of winter feed supply where climate usually prevents the harvesting of high quality hay.

